



Generation Z, Diaspora Identity, and the New Face of Online Radicalisation

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Generation Z, Diaspora Identity, and the New Face of Online Radicalisation

By Noor Huda Ismail

SYNOPSIS

The recent arrest of an Indonesian Generation Z national in Jordan for alleged online support of the Islamic State highlights a growing security challenge: youth radicalisation occurring entirely in digital spaces, detached from formal extremist organisations. Diaspora youth are especially vulnerable to identity-driven, emotionally-charged narratives circulating across transnational online ecosystems. Crucially, these pathways extend beyond Islamist extremism to far-right, white supremacist, and neo-Nazi subcultures, exposing common vulnerabilities across ideologies.

COMMENTARY

In May last year, Jordanian authorities arrested an Indonesian teenager from Generation Z – digital natives who have grown up online – suspected of supporting the Islamic State, which was done entirely through social media. There was no travel, no training camps, no organisational ties, yet the case moved through Jordan's juvenile courts, signalling a striking shift: online activity alone now triggers security action.

This episode highlights a new reality of radicalisation, especially among young diaspora populations. For Generation Z, extremism is increasingly individualised, digitally mediated, and identity-driven – it is less about joining a group, more about seeking belonging, dignity, and moral purpose.

Importantly, this dynamic is not limited to Islamist-inspired extremism. Similar patterns emerge in [far-right and neo-Nazi subcultures](#). This includes True Country Community (TCC) accelerationist networks comprising people who believe that

technological change should happen quickly, even if it destroys existing systems and leads to radical social change.

Young individuals consume content glorifying racial, cultural, or civilisational decline, often via gaming platforms, meme cultures, livestream chats, and encrypted forums. These environments recycle narratives of humiliation, marginalisation, and moral duty, offering belonging and purpose akin to Islamist extremist pathways. As in Islamist-inspired extremism, belonging precedes belief, and identity affirmation drives engagement more than ideology.

Why Diaspora Gen Z is Especially Vulnerable

Generation Z has grown up with algorithmically curated content, global crises livestreamed in real time, and constant exposure to moral outrage. For diaspora youth, this intersects with identity negotiation across borders. Young Indonesians abroad navigate home culture, host society, and transnational online communities. While most manage successfully, alienation or personal crisis can amplify the appeal of narratives that promise clarity and moral certainty.

Many diaspora youth encounter extremist ideas not through Indonesian networks such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) or Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) but through fragments such as emotionally-charged videos of injustice, decontextualised slogans, and online influencers who simplify complex conflicts into moral binaries.

Similarly, far-right pathways exploit online content that frames societal decline and demographic threat – their perceived belief that a “native” group is being replaced or eroded by demographic change – as urgent moral imperatives. Both result in *identity fusion* – psychological alignment with imagined communities, whether a global ummah or a threatened race or nation – without formal group affiliation.

The Jordanian case illustrates the paradox: radicalisation may unfold invisibly online, yet consequences are immediate once detected.

From Organisational Networks to Identity Fusion

Traditional counterterrorism frameworks dismantled organisations, arrested leaders, and disrupted cells – a model effective against JI. Today’s threat operates without organisations.

Many Generation Z radicals, across ideologies, experience identity fusion: alignment with symbolic communities that confer meaning, legitimacy, and moral clarity. JI, JAD and other far-right movements often serve as symbolic reservoirs rather than operational actors. The danger lies in self-initiated radical trajectories emerging from personal identity struggles amplified by digital ecosystems.

Absence of Context

A defining feature of online radicalisation among diaspora youth is context collapse. Conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Gaza, or Ukraine are consumed through

emotionally-charged snippets stripped of historical, political, and social nuance. Algorithms reward outrage, not understanding. In Islamist and far-right contexts alike, empathy compresses into moral binaries, enemies are dehumanised, and violence can appear justified. The Jordanian case shows that legal and security systems may respond to radicalisation even before violence occurs.

Indonesia's BNPT and Diaspora Resilience

Recognising these shifts, Indonesia's National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) has begun preventive initiatives addressing identity, narrative, and contextualisation, especially among diaspora communities. Beyond enforcement, BNPT supports research and engagement on diaspora youth resilience, including Indonesians in high-exposure environments such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. These regions feature heavily in extremist propaganda and online discourse.

In November last year, BNPT operationalised this through films and book discussions with Indonesian diaspora communities. Rather than framing the sessions as counter-ideological interventions, they created spaces for dialogue on how regional and global conflicts are experienced online. Films and books, grounded in field research, served as narrative entry points. Discussions with the author enabled participants to question assumptions, express emotions, and critically engage with the material – shifting the dynamic from instruction to reflection.

Participants reported that much of their understanding of conflicts came from social media rather than from formal education. Emotionally powerful content often bypasses critical thinking. BNPT's approach offered contextual anchoring, preserving empathy while mitigating absolutism. This methodology bridges credibility gaps in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) programming, as Generation Z audiences often mistrust institutional messaging.

Contextualisation as a Security Tool

BNPT's strategy shows that radicalisation risks arise not from empathy, but from decontextualised empathy. Separating emotion from context creates vulnerability to manipulation. Some diaspora youth – particularly those in Pakistan – were in fact part of “sleeper cells” who had previously been with Indonesia's radical group ecosystem, highlighting how historical organisational ties can intersect with identity-driven radicalisation abroad. Encouraging diaspora youth to situate conflicts within historical, political, and social frameworks prevents identity fusion from hardening into zero-sum worldviews. This method cultivates critical thinking and preserves moral agency, regardless of ideological orientation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The Jordanian case is not a sign of organisational resurgence but of a new radicalisation ecology: decentralised, affective, and identity-driven. The implications for Indonesia and regional partners are clear:

- Diaspora engagement must be a core prevention and resilience strategy, recognising diaspora communities as active shapers of narratives and transnational influence, not merely passive audiences.
- Early prevention should invest in identity resilience, digital literacy, and contextual understanding.
- Enforcement measures should be complemented by preventive engagement long before legal thresholds are crossed.

BNPT's narrative-based interventions exemplify a promising approach, recognising that combating extremism is not only about dismantling networks but also about supporting youth in navigating meaning, belonging, and moral responsibility in a borderless digital environment.

Conclusion

The Jordanian case highlights that radicalisation among Generation Z unfolds silently, online, and across borders – until it becomes a security issue. Islamist, far-right, or neo-Nazi inspirations all exploit the same vulnerabilities: identity crises amplified by digital ecosystems. In this era, counterterrorism strategies must prioritise contextualisation, dialogue, and identity repair. For Southeast Asia, the future lies as much in narrative engagement and diaspora resilience as in intelligence and enforcement.

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